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JULY

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32

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PART 176.

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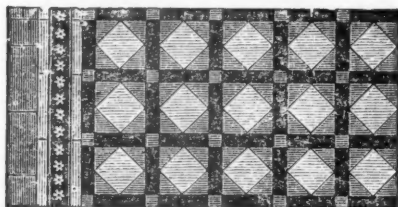
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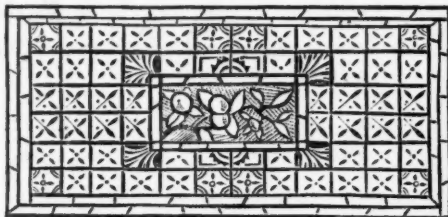


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JACK made Moor Royal his "head-quarters," as he termed it, until March. If he used the words in the sense of meaning that he honoured Moor Royal with his presence more frequently than he did any other place, or that, when he did so honour it, he gave his fullest head-power to the forwarding of anything like intellectual life there, the designation was certainly a misnomer.

These first three months of the first new year which had witnessed the dethronement of old Mrs. Ray, were unquestionably not happy ones to either the widow or her children. Old Mrs. Ray and Jenifer lived apart to themselves a great deal, and this not through any sulky desire to hold aloof from or seem to disapprove of Effie and her doings, but really because Effie made it practically impossible that their daily life should harmonise.

It was difficult to say when the divergence began with Jenifer, for Jenifer was equally at home in the saddle, and was always as safe to be there or thereabouts in the field as her sister-in-law, when she rode to hounds. But with Miss Ray, riding to hounds was not a weekly luxury. With young Mrs. Ray it was more than this—it was, she declared, a necessity. Accordingly, as the hounds met three times a week near Moor Royal, the pick of the Moor Royal stables were pretty hardly pressed to keep pace with the needs of their young mistress, who soon manifested her determination to be in the first flight in the field as well as in society. Consequently the mare that had hitherto been at Jenifer's disposal on the days when she

did hunt, was now relegated to the service of her sister-in-law.

"I wouldn't ride the bay mare if you really cared for hunting, for the world," Effie gravely assured Jenifer, "but you don't care for it; you wouldn't give up all consideration for other people, and go out, 'weather or not' permitting, as I do, now would you?"

This she said one day when she knew, from various signs and indications, that Jenifer had resolved to go to the meet at least. In fact, Jenifer had made up her mind very lovingly and carefully to make one appeal on behalf of her brother Jack to Mr. Boldero, and she knew that she could do this easily at a lawn-meet at Hallowmore.

"I feel inclined to give up consideration for you anyway to-day, Effie," Jenifer said frankly. "I've made up my mind to ride, and to ride Shooting Star. You have the choice of so many. I'm not really depriving you of an atom of pleasure."

"That's as one looks at it," Mrs. Ray said fretfully. "I wanted to spare my Reine till there really was a chance of a good run. Shooting Star potters about so well—she's not my form for galloping or fencing, but she potters deliciously."

"I am afraid you must potter about on something else to-day, Effie, however admirably Shooting Star may suit you."

"Jenny, you're going out with an object; oh, and your brothers quote you as being so guileless and superior! Jenifer, take the advice of a woman of the world. A hunting woman, especially one who has to make an effort to be one, won't attract Captain Edgecumb."

She said it with a little spitefully sarcastic laugh, and an indescribable assumption of being more conversant with Captain Edgecumb's motives than anyone else,

that would have been funny had it not been insulting.

"Be quite sure that when I want to attract Captain Edgecumb, I will come to you for instruction; to-day I won't tax either your patience or good-nature," Jenifer said temperately, but Mrs. Ray knew from her sister-in-law's averted face and measured tones that her shot had gone home.

"I've no time to argue the question now, the horses will be round in a minute or two," Effie said, walking round Jenifer in order to get a straight look into the girl's eyes; "but I'll just offer you one hint, though you're sure to take it ungracefully and misunderstand my motive in giving it. Don't think to win Captain Edgecumb by any pretence of indifference; he's very honest and straightforward himself, and has a horror of anything like finesse in a girl."

"Here are the horses," was the only reply Jenifer vouchsafed to Mrs. Ray.

Jack had come up from the home-farm to join the Moor Royal party; and, as Jenifer came out, both her brothers greeted her cordially.

"Glad to see you out with us again, Jenny dear," Jack cried heartily, and Jenifer felt self-reproachful for a moment, as she thought of how she was going to try and upset what Jack was foolish enough to fancy was his happiness.

"It will be like old times to see you in the field again, dear," Hubert said kindly, for this was the first time that Jenifer had attempted to hunt since her father's death.

"I don't think I shall follow," Jenifer said.

"I shouldn't on Shooting Star," Mrs. Ray cried contemptuously; "she's so uncertain."

"I never found her that, Effie."

"Perhaps you've never ridden her at a big thing; now I have, and it hasn't been her fault that she has got well over. You mustn't rely on Hubert to look after you to-day, please. I won't have his run spoil if we do get a decent one."

Jenifer laughed.

"Don't be afraid, Effie; I won't spoil the look of the paragraph in which it will be told that Mr. and Mrs. Ray, of Moor Royal, were as usual in the first flight."

"I can't imagine what you come for if you don't care to ride," Effie exclaimed discontentedly, "the off days would surely do as well for you if you only want to potter about the roads; it would have spared Reine if I could have sent her on,

and ridden Shooting Star to the meet. I hate selfishness."

"You must remember, darling, that Shooting Star is Jenny's own mare," Hubert took an opportunity of saying to his wife when Jenifer and Jack trotted on a little.

"Her own! Who pays for the mare's keep, I ask? You know that you do, Hugh. I really don't think that a girl without a penny is justified in running her brother into such unnecessary expense. She's not wrapped up heart and soul in riding as I am; indeed, I'm sure she only came out to-day to spite me, because she knew I'd made up my mind to ride Shooting Star."

Hubert idolised his wife, and always acted as if he fully believed her false utterances, but he did not like to hear Jenifer called selfish.

"We must remember that only the other day Jenifer ruled absolutely at Moor Royal."

"Sometimes you tell me that your mother's was the absolute rule."

"So it was; don't you see my father gave up everything to mother, whose delight it was to give up everything to Jenny. You don't know what a dear sister she has always been to me. I owe most of the privileges and pleasures of my young manhood to Jenny."

"Pray don't be sentimental, Hugh. Jenifer seems to have transferred her interest to Jack now; she's miserable because he's only a tenant-farmer, and because he is happy in the society of keepers."

"I can't quite make Jack out, Effie," her husband said thoughtfully; "that he wishes to settle down in the country is natural enough, but that he should be contented to settle down in such a very small and mild way is startling."

"I never perplex myself by conjecturing why so-and-so does such and such a thing," Effie said scornfully; then she added: "Jack will be happy enough in his own way, if he is let alone and not worried. His tastes are not extremely refined, and he'll be more at ease among the people he has known all his life here, than he would among your friends in town."

"Jenny has been speaking to me about his going to Thurtle's house so much, but I don't see anything in it, do you, Effie?"

"Certainly not," young Mrs. Ray said with suspicion. "Jenifer overrates her own judgment dreadfully, and as she really knows nothing of the world beyond the boundaries of Exeter, she makes herself

ridiculous." Then they rode through the lodge-gates into the grounds of Hallowmore, and Mrs. Ray was soon surrounded by the members of the hunt who had the honour of being on speaking terms with its most distinguished wearer of a habit.

Meanwhile Jenifer had ridden on with Jack, and they had been joined by Mr. Boldero.

"You mean riding to-day?" Jack questioned, for the lawyer was mounted on his favourite hunter.

"I mean following, Jack, but I won't say what place I shall be in at the finish, for I'm going to ask you to allow me to have the honour of taking the charge of your sister off your hands." Now Jenifer had written to ask him to do this, for she felt the time was ripe for her again to speak for Jack's social salvation. But Jack himself had no fancy for leaving her in the company of the "family lawyer," whom his sister-in-law was teaching him to distrust.

"I think I'll look after Jenifer myself to-day, thank you," Jack said with niggardly courtesy.

"No, no, Jack," Jenifer put in hastily, "it's so long since I've ridden to hounds that I'd rather take it quietly to-day, and I know you will go straight. Don't let me stop you. I'll stay quite contentedly with Mr. Boldero."

But Jack, though he knew that his soul would yearn to be off when once they found, would not give in his adhesion to Jenifer's proposal yet.

"Perhaps Edgcomb will turn up presently; his mare overreached herself and goes tenderly, so he won't be able to ride hard. But you mustn't keep Mr. Boldero out of it, Jenny; he won't thank you for doing that," the young brother said, and then in his desire to secure Captain Edgcomb as an escort for his sister, he rode off, leaving her alone with Mr. Boldero.

"You know why I want to see you," she began, without any idle preface. "He is going to ruin. Once more I ask you to speak to him, to stop him."

"I cannot! This is final. With all my heart would I add my entreaties and warnings to yours, but the power to do so has been taken out of my hands. I know that he has been offered good appointments at high salaries. I know that an agency to large estates—a post for which he is exactly fitted—is open to him now, but I can't press him to accept it."

"Mr. Boldero, what is the secret power which holds you back; you surely don't

want to see us Rays ruined?" she asked simply, leaning forward on Shooting Star's neck to gain a clearer view of his face.

"Heaven forbid!"

"But it is evident that man or woman has constrained you to stand by supinely and see one of us going down. Oh, do, do! if you cared for my father as we all believe you did, save his son."

"If the sacrifice of all my worldly goods would do it, I would do it," he said fervently.

"You say that; it's easy; but you won't speak the word that might do it. I wish I had not come out, you have disappointed me this time more cruelly than before, for you must have felt that I was in extremity before I wrote to you."

She turned her horse's head and rode sharply away, to the wonderment of so much of the field as had leisure to observe her. And Mr. Boldero did not venture to follow her.

Meantime old Mrs. Ray, having nothing else to do in Jenifer's absence, had gone down to the home-farm to see what arrangements had been made in the house for Jack's comfort.

She was quite alive now to the right which was hers of taking away any furniture that she desired from Moor Royal. And she was quite resolved that if she found the farmhouse rooms inadequately furnished, she would exert that right, and have her son's new home fitted up with some of his customary surroundings.

It was a bright, keen March morning, and without going into eloquent descriptions of the state and appearance of each young blade of corn and grass, and the accurate colour or tint of every cloud and rivulet, it may be mentioned that the atmosphere was bright and invigorating, the aspect of the fields and hedgerows, the meadows and cornfields, very fair. Altogether it was an atmosphere that braced the nerves, and set one's standpoint in life in the brightest and best light.

"Poor dear boy! I dare say it's all bare and ugly enough after what he has been accustomed to at Moor Royal," the mother thought, as she walked down to inspect her son's house for the first time since he had occupied it.

In days not long gone by, she had been in the habit of driving down to the home-farm every week to see what poultry, butter, and eggs Mrs. Cowley could supply to Moor Royal.

But since the general break-up the

widow had not felt moved to tread the well-known round to which her feet had become well habituated while she was in power.

It pleased her well as she approached the house to see the old-fashioned looking garden neater and trimmer than it had ever been even under the Cowley rule. Long borders of primroses, cowslips, and snowdrops wound ribbon-like round every bed. And all the windows were bright with hyacinths of every shade, from creamy white to darkest blue and red, in glasses, and with gaudy but beautiful double tulips in pots.

"Dear Jenny has taken care that he shall have flowers to remind him of home," the mother thought tenderly, as she marked with pleasure that the flowers were softly framed by white muslin curtains as well as by the heavy dark ones that she herself had sent down from Moor Royal. Then she opened the hall-door, and went into the wide red-brick passage, calling as she entered for Elsie, the girl who had been scullery-maid for some time at Moor Royal, and who had now come "to do" for Mr. Jack, as she herself expressed it.

The kitchen-door stood open, and a fine appetising odour of bread-baking streamed forth. Something else streamed forth also, and that was a dialogue carried on by two highly-pitched female voices. The first words that fell on old Mrs. Ray's astounded ears were spoken by Elsie.

"I don't care nor know what you're a-goin' to be, Minnie Thurtle; you knows best about that yourself, I s'pose; but I know you're not a-goin' to come here now and order me about as if you was my missus. I'll take orders from none but master, and the ladies up to Moor Royal; and if you choose to come a-poking, and prying, and ordering in my kitchen, you'll have to hear what I've got to say—there!"

"You'll find yourself walked out of this house before you're many days older, Miss Impudence," were the next words that quivered forth in accents of fury, and then both speakers became aware of old Mrs. Ray's presence, and silence reigned.

#### SHILLINGBURY SKETCHES.

##### NO. XI. OUR MAN OF GENIUS.

ON the first Monday in every month there was always an unusual air of life and motion in Shillingbury market-place as the hours drew on to eleven o'clock in the forenoon, for that was the time when our

magistrates met to administer justice in the club-room of The Black Bull. Our people seemed to be a very well-conducted lot, judged by the usual character of the charge-sheet. The justices rarely had cases to deal with more serious than those which arose from surreptitious onslaughts upon Squire Winsor's preserves, or from a difference of opinion culminating in the "argumentum ad baculum" between two village mothers, or from the effects of that "one more glass" swallowed on a market-day. Some there were, of that class which takes delight in picking holes everywhere, who used to affirm that the lightness of the calendar was due to the leniency or incompetency of the new rural police, rather than to any superior standard of morality in Shillingbury and its neighbourhood.

But on a certain Monday morning there were signs that a case of more than ordinary weight was coming on for investigation. The magistrates' room was filled as soon as the doors were opened, and after a little preliminary business had been disposed of, one Miles Lockwood was brought into the room and charged with the wilful murder of Timothy Deane, a fellow-workman.

The circumstances of the case were simple enough, but the police and the solicitor from Martlebury who defended the prisoner managed to muddle them so efficiently that it was evening before Lockwood was committed for trial. Then he was not committed on the capital charge, but for manslaughter.

The story was simply this: Lockwood and Deane were both of them stonemasons in the employ of a London contractor who was building a new wing to Mr. Winsor's mansion. On the Saturday evening these two, in company with half-a-dozen others, were sitting in the village public-house, and Deane, a quarrelsome fellow, disliked by everybody, and feared as well for his heavy fist and sharp tongue, was doing his best to make Lockwood the butt of the company by foul-mouthed jests and brutal horse-play. At last the latter, flushed with drink and provoked beyond endurance, stood up and struck his persecutor a blow on the head with a heavy pewter measure. Deane fell heavily to the floor, and Lockwood, sobered in a moment, stood staring with the flattened pot in his hand, while the others picked up the senseless form of Deane. They laid him on a bench and sent for a doctor; but they needed no doctor to tell them that he was a dead

man. The landlord, fearing for the character of his house, was more anxious to see the policeman than Dr. Goldingham, and sent privately for the minion of the law, who very soon arrived and carried Miles Lockwood off to the Shillingbury police-station.

The case came on for trial at the next assizes. The prisoner pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. When the first excitement of the tragedy had subsided, we ceased to think much of Miles Lockwood and his misfortunes, and never dreamed of seeing him again; so it came somewhat as a surprise when we discovered that he was the tenant of a tumble-down cottage standing upon the confines of Pudsey Heath, but within the boundary of Shillingbury, whither he had likewise brought his wife and two children.

People were a little curious about him at first, and the boys he might meet on the heath would look with wide-mouthed awe at the man who had actually spilt another man's blood; but there was no especial enmity towards Miles on account of that hasty blow of his. He had always passed for a quiet, inoffensive man, while Deane had been universally hated as a riotous bully. In a very short time, however, all curiosity abated, and we thought no more of Miles Lockwood than of any other cottager in the place.

Lockwood was a weak-looking man with narrow chest and stooping shoulders. In his everyday work he had no part in the hewing and sawing and the other hard work of a stonemason's calling. His eye was correct, and his hand delicate enough to work at the finest details of any plan or drawing; but his powers were not limited by the mere faculty of imitation. Out of the bits of refuse stone and marble which lay about in the work-sheds he would fashion little busts and heads, and quaintly grotesque faces, perfectly correct in form, and full of such life and spirit as could only be born from the touch of a true artist. No one knew anything about his early history; but it was commonly believed that he was a man who had known better days, and that he had not been brought up in his present calling. He certainly was well acquainted with books and men of whom the average stonemason knows nothing. He was moody in humour, rarely fore-gathering with his fellow-workmen either in their recreations or their debaucheries; but when he did join them in a drinking

about he would generally swallow two or three pints of strong beer, and then either drop off to sleep or sit silent and bemused in a corner. As a workman his employers had nothing but what was good to say of him, and when he came out of prison the Governor handed him a note from his late master offering him work at once. But Miles would have no more of it. As he walked forth into freedom he knew that he must set to work at once to earn bread for himself and his family; but that inclination for solitude which had always possessed him had grown stronger during his imprisonment, and he determined that for the future he would work, as he lived, alone. The cottage on Pudsey Heath was vacant, and a more solitary abode it would have been hard to find; so he hired it, and, having got together a few sticks of furniture, he sent for his wife and children, and set to work to earn a livelihood after his own fashion.

The cottage was a miserable dwelling, thatched, and only habitable on the ground-floor; but it was not without its advantages. The rent was very low, there was a large garden attached to it, and a roomy shed in which Miles could work at his handicraft when he could get anything to do, or when it was too wet to dig the garden. It stood a stone's-throw from the roadside, with the ground sloping rapidly downwards in the rear until the heath became lost in the swampy meadows which fringed the banks of our river. About half-way down the slope a seam of chalk cropped up to the surface, and for some distance the hill had been cut away, and the chalk burnt into lime in a kiln which was now deserted and in ruins. The chalk was very hard and might be detached from the quarry in large masses. Miles had often cut faces and heads in Pudsey chalk when he had been at work at Mr. Winsor's, and perhaps he may have had his eye upon the disused chalk-pit, as a sort of Carrara, when he fixed his abode at the cottage on the heath.

Miles and his wife were not much troubled with neighbours. Two or three small farmhouses stood on the other side of the heath; and down by the river one could see the tannery and cottages of Brooksbank End; but if the Lockwood family had lived in the midst of us they would probably have been just as much isolated as they were on Pudsey Heath. Miles, as I have before said, was a recluse by disposition, and he was, besides this, a

Londoner. Our people looked very much askance at all strangers, and at Londoners in particular, and, to make matters worse, Mrs. Lockwood was an Irishwoman and a Roman Catholic.

She was a tall, handsome woman, some ten years younger than her husband, with regular features, soft grey eyes, and black hair which always hung in heavy undisciplined hanks around her face. Her smile was bright and her voice soft, and those few people who ever exchanged a word with her would declare that she was a pleasant-spoken woman, though she did worship the Virgin Mary. Lonely as she was, the life upon the wide heath was a sort of paradise after the horrors of the London court where Miles had met and married her. It was something like the hillside in Roscommon, where she was born; but the place she lived in mattered little to Nora so long as she had her husband near her, for she loved Miles with all the fervour, and with something more than the ordinary constancy, of the Celtic nature.

Miles had a voracious appetite for reading of all sorts, and would almost always have some bit of printed matter before him when he was not at work. Mr. Winsor used to lend and even to give him books, but these were generally of a sort Miles did not much appreciate. They dealt too much with the conversion of the Irish dock-labourer, and of the upward struggle of the sceptical working-man towards respectability and a seat in the side aisle of the parish church. Like most town-bred men, Miles was a great lover of plants and flowers. In those days people were much more given to the study of herbs than they are now, and one of the first reports circulated concerning Miles was that he was a "rare claver man about yarbs," some going so far as to declare that he knew as much about them as old Mrs. Jillings, of Blanham, herself; but, whether he did or not, everybody knew that he gave Peggy Lawson's girl a drink which stilled her pulse and threw her into a gentle sleep, after she had been three days in a raging fever. And Lockwood had mastered other branches of the healing art as well. He had an old book on Farriery, and he could cure the strangles, and milk-fever, and quarter evil, as well as, or better than, the cow-leech at Offbury. Once, too, when Farmer Docking's ewes were doing badly at the beginning of lambing, Miles met him on the road and wrote a few

words on a bit of paper, which he bade the farmer take to the druggist at Martlebury, and to give all his flock a teaspoonful of the powder thereon mentioned once a day for three days. Mr. Docking was in despair, so he followed Miles's advice, though the latter was a Londoner. The powder worked wonders. The plague was stayed, and Farmer Docking had a fine crop of lambs after all.

Miles set to work with a will to bring his wilderness of a garden into order. As spring came on the path leading up to the door was gay with crocus and snowdrop, and in less than a year honeysuckle and the wild hop had clothed the ragged walls, and were crawling up over the grey straw thatch. Miles did odd jobs of work for a stonemason in the town and for Mr. Winsor as well. The latter had all along shown a thoughtful kindness for Miles, and had assisted him materially at a crisis when a little help was worth a great deal of pity; but he worked harder and more constantly at his chalk images in his own workshop than at anything else, for this was labour after his own heart. Up to this time he had always worked by rule of thumb, inventing his design as he went along; but one day Mr. Winsor gave him some illustrations, loose leaves from some book on ancient art, and, as he turned them over, a new world of wonder and delight was revealed to him; such a one as Keats was aware of when he read for the first time the stately lines of Chapman's Homer. Then he began to copy them; first the more simple designs—tragic and comic masks, and such like; then busts and torsos; and finally, the full-length figures. Whatever he did, he did with the most accurate conscientious fidelity to the model before him; but, in spite of himself, he gave it a separate individuality, a touch of character imprinted by the unseen spirit of the artist which guided unconsciously his tool as he worked at the block of chalk. Week by week he toiled more and more at his busts and fauns, and less and less at the mechanical drudgery of the stonemason's yard, and he did not grow much the richer for this. The garden certainly was planted, but bread was necessary while the potatoes were growing; and it was only when the cupboard was nearly bare that Miles would forego his art and take a spell at carving cherubs on grave-stones in Mr. Toomer's yard. His wife would be a little querulous at times, not unreasonably so, seeing that she often had

to go to bed hungry. At last one of the children fell ill, and she had not a penny to buy a little meat for broth; so she went to her husband with more of anger in her voice than she had ever yet shown, and asked him why he didn't sell some of those things he wasted so much time over, if he wouldn't work to get his children their food.

But Miles could not bear the thought of parting with any of his creatures. He laughed uneasily at his wife's suggestion, and said nobody was likely to care for anything of his workmanship; he meant to go down to the stone-yard to-morrow, and perhaps the day after. Mr. Toomer owed for a job or two of work, so there would be money to take, and meanwhile there was a shilling to go and buy a bit of beef.

The next morning Miles went off to make a long day's work amongst Mr. Toomer's mortuary emblems; and almost as soon as he was gone Nora began to consider whether, in spite of her husband's modesty, some of the little images might not be saleable. She made up her mind that she would try at any rate; and, having packed six of what she considered the best in a basket, she set off to Martlebury. As she tramped the long seven miles of road she pictured Miles's delight when she should return with a sovereign or perhaps with two; for poor Nora never guessed the reason of her husband's unwillingness to hawk about his cherished works.

She had lived in Martlebury while Miles was in prison, and by Mr. Winsor's kindness she had got work as a sempstress, and it was to the ladies who had then given her work that she first exhibited her wares; but she rather scandalised one lady of a serious turn by bringing out for approval, the Venus of Capua, a subject which the lady described as unfit for any Christian household. The lady, who had a kind heart in spite of her puritanism, as soon as she saw the look of disappointment which came over the poor woman's face, made amends by buying a bust of Lucius Verus, which she pronounced very cheap at five shillings. She advised Nora to take the others to a Mr. Kerrich, a printseller in the town, who dealt in such things, and Mr. Kerrich, who had a pretty keen eye, at once saw traces of the artist's hand, and took the lot for a sovereign. Norah went home rejoicing.

Miles came back late that night from Shillingbury, and before he had time to

note the loss of his treasures his wife had told him all, and with joyous eyes put the money into his hand.

At first he did feel a twinge of regret as he thought of his empty shelf; but when he saw the pride and pleasure in Nora's eyes, he had not the heart to say a cross word. After all she was right. It was nothing better than silly selfishness to keep the things on the shelf while the children wanted proper food. He could make plenty more, and at five shillings each they would bring in money enough for their needs, and he would not want to carve any more of those hideous cherubs in Mr. Toomer's yard.

About a week after this there came a letter from Mr. Kerrich asking Miles to call upon him about some more work, and Miles came back from Martlebury with a happy look in his eyes and a bundle of drawings under his arm.

The next day a heavy waggon drew up at the cottage, and the men unloaded a lot of blocks and slabs of the finest marble, upon which Miles was now to work instead of common chalk.

The Marquis of Folkestone had gone into Mr. Kerrich's shop and had been greatly struck with the grace of the little statuettes. He at once determined that the man who had wrought these was the man he wanted to work upon the mantelpiece of his library, and for three months Miles was hard at work on sculptured figures and delicate design. The chimney-piece when it was finished was pronounced a masterpiece. Miles's fortune was as good as made. The principal stonemason in Martlebury offered him a permanent berth with good wages, but Miles declined. He knew that he would have nothing else to do except to carve ineffectual cinerary urns and stock tombstones all his life; and besides this he had grown strongly attached to his home, which he had patched up here and added to there, till it had become a seemly dwelling. Then he could not bear to leave the chalk-pit and the free work at his beloved images, work which was ten times more fascinating to him than even the marble magnificence of the Marquis of Folkestone's mantelpiece; so he stuck to the cottage on the heath, managing to make a good living by the sale of his images, for which Mr. Kerrich found a ready market, and from the produce of his garden, which he cultivated with an assiduity worthy of Candide.

But Miles Lockwood, though people had

long forgiven him the death of Timothy Deane, though he was a sober inoffensive man, was not favourably looked upon. At the time of which I am writing the belief in occult agencies and witchcraft was active amongst the common people. All that lay outside the narrow circle of their own experience was vague and mysterious, and all who came from this dim and mysterious region were glanced at suspiciously in any case; but if they happened to be skilled in handiwork or book-learning, then would arise at once a belief that they did not get their cleverness without some schooling from the Prince of Darkness. The gods of rude people are always malevolent spirits, whom it is well to conciliate by offerings of some kind or another; and it is a survival of this belief which would make old Peggy Lawson walk ten miles with a new five-shilling piece in her pocket, to consult a wise woman, after churning for three weeks and getting no butter. To the people who lived round about him Miles was an alien in every respect, and this alone was enough to kindle suspicion. Sometimes, in the dusk of a spring evening, some bird's-nesting urchins would meet Miles staggering home over the heath, with a great block of chalk on his shoulder, and would run away quickly from the glance of his keen black eyes. Again, his workshop was always closely barred to every one except his wife. The window was blocked, too, as some venturesome explorers one day discovered, and this circumstance went far to establish the belief that Lockwood must be after some very queer work, and, perhaps, have some very queer helpers, since he was afraid to be overlooked by his fellows. Mr. Wilcox, the parish clerk, said that no good was to be expected of a man who had married a Papist; and that though, for all they knew, Miles didn't worship the Virgin Mary, he certainly made graven images, which was almost as bad, as anybody who read the prayer-book would see.

After Miles had lived about six years in the cottage, it happened that Farmer Dredge, of White Olland, hired of the poor's trustees the right of pasture on the heath, and, being a man who never lost a right for want of claiming it, he gave notice to Miles that, from henceforth, all people who took chalk from the pit would have to pay for it, offering, at the same time, to let him help himself on a payment of five pounds a year. Now Mr. Dredge had about as much right to charge Miles for the chalk

from the pit as he had to put a price on the air which blew over the heath, and Miles was lawyer enough to know this. So he went on helping himself, and took no heed of Mr. Dredge's considerate offer. But one day there came for him a summons to present himself before the Shillingbury justices, and answer a charge of having stolen two blocks of chalk, value sixpence, the property of Thomas Dredge, on a certain given date.

The summons was dismissed, and Mr. Dredge, having had to pay all costs, went out of court with a hearty contempt for the law, and a resolution to do Miles an ill-turn whenever he could; but he was not able to do much, except to drop suggestive hints that he meant to have his own, however anxious other folks might be to speak the devil fair, and perhaps them as was in the devil's pay might have to swim for their lives in the mill-dam, as they used in the days he had heard his grandfather talk of.

The following summer was very wet, and the autumn was little less than a continuous deluge. There was much sickness about, and Mrs. Dredge was taken with pains in the back and limbs, disinclination for food, and other symptoms of low fever, but Mr. Dredge and other wise people took another view of the case; and, shaking their heads, affirmed that she was "under bad hands," and let it be seen that they had little doubt who was the person who had cast the spell upon her. Then Farmer Dredge's best cow died, and soon after the rot broke out amongst his sheep. Our people ignored the wet season as the cause of these misfortunes, and traced them all to that quarrel between the farmer and Miles. The latter was shunned more than ever, and those who were perforce brought near him were cringingly polite, as it was wise to be towards a man who had such potent spells at his fingers'-ends.

But when the low fever spread rapidly, when there was some one sick in every other cottage down at Brooksbank End; when the sheep-rot began to spread, and three cows died of lung disease in one week, there arose a cry that something must be done, and hints were dropped that the expedition to the mill-dam, which Farmer Dredge had talked about, had better be undertaken at once. One Saturday evening there was a meeting of the more bloody-minded of the conspirators, and then began the talk of

deciding who should bell the cat, and the usual backwardness in coming forward manifested itself. No one seemed to like the task of laying hands on the wizard. The counsels of the party became less truculent, and finally it was resolved to treat Miles to a bit of "rough music" that very same evening.

In our country "rough music" was used to express public disapproval of the person serenaded. If a man brutally ill-used his wife or children, or was a bad neighbour, or made himself generally obnoxious, certain of the villagers would appoint themselves guardians of the public weal, and set forth by night armed with kettles, and horns, and bells, and other instruments of hideous clamour, to let the offender know that he must mend his ways. Such was the remedy now proposed for the havoc wrought to Farmer Dredge's stock. The serenaders picked their way in silence over the heath, and when the feeble light, shining in Lockwood's window, came in sight, Farmer Dredge ordered a halt to discuss the final disposition of the attack. The advance was then ordered, and soon the fearsome uproar began. Never before had such a devil's tattoo been heard on the lonely heath; but bad as it was, there must have been a feeling amongst some of the more ardent serenaders that rough music was a very milk-and-watery sort of way of dealing with a case of right-down witchcraft. However, it will never be known how the catastrophe of that night really did take its rise.

Everyone knows how easily mischief is begun and how rapidly it gathers strength in its progress. While the bells were clanging and the bellow of the horns was frightful to hear, a little speck of light shone upon the eaves of the thatch. It was not a candle surely, for there was no window on that side. No. It spread and spread. Suddenly the clamour ceased, and something very much like terror overspread the faces of the mischief-makers, for the fire ran rapidly along the dry straw at the eaves, and in a minute everybody knew Miles Lockwood's cottage was on fire. Then a sudden shriek. The door was thrown open, showing the inside full of smoke, and a woman in her night-clothes rushed out. The next moment Miles burst forth from the shed where he had been at work and dragged his wife into his workshop, while the courageous troop, aghast at the unlooked-for mischief,

slunk rapidly away into the darkness out of the ever widening circle of light which spread from the flames darting and creeping round the thatch and the wooden gables of the cottage.

When morning broke there was nothing left of Miles Lockwood's home but heaps of ashes and blackened walls. His work-shed had fortunately escaped, as the wind had carried the flames in the opposite direction; and there, upon his bench with no other covering than a sack and his own coat, lay his wife raving in an access of the fever from which she had been suffering for some days past. Early in the day Dr. Goldingham was there with a close carriage and a nurse, and took the poor sufferer back to his own house. If good nursing and medical skill could have saved her she might have recovered; but the shock had been too severe, and in less than a week she was dead.

She was buried in the churchyard, and after a little Miles, with the rector's consent, placed a plain slab of stone without word or date over the grave. He refused to leave his work-shed. He had fixed up some rough beds for his children; and there he now ate and slept as well as laboured. By degrees the story of the rough music leaked out, and there was some talk of police interference; but probably no one but the guilty person knew whose hand had put fire to the thatch that night. Miles was resolutely silent on the subject. He shut himself up in the shed working, so some people said, day and night, week-days and Sundays all the same. Dr. Goldingham tried to see him, for he was a little fearful for the poor fellow's reason; but when he went to the heath Miles would remark in a quiet tone, holding the shed-door half-open, that he was grateful to the doctor for all his kindness, but he wanted for nothing now. He did not say that he only wanted to be let alone, but the doctor knew what he meant, and took his leave.

Simon Deverel, of Cobb Hall, however, did get speech at Miles now and then. These two had always been good friends, and Simon had always laughed at the silly stories about witchcraft and the like.

Simon had had no trouble that winter with his flocks and herds, and our wise-acres declared that this good luck came from speaking the devil fair, for had not Simon lent Miles Lockwood a horse and cart times out of number, and didn't he let the Irishwoman have milk for her stir-

about as often as she liked to go up to the farm for it? Some, however, were farsighted enough to maintain that old Mrs. Deverel knew as much about the black art as Miles himself, and that she could beat back any spell he might cast over Cobb Hall and its belongings. These good people none of them remembered that Simon had kept his cows well sheltered all through the wet weather, and had moved his sheep off the soddened pastures in good time.

One Saturday afternoon Simon was busy in his stable, when he heard a footstep outside, and, looking up, he saw Miles standing in the doorway. He had come to ask for the loan of a horse and cart, he said, to fetch some bits of marble which were lying at a canal wharf a few miles distant. There was a look of unusual excitement on his face, and his eye flashed and his hand trembled nervously as he spoke. Simon asked him how he was in a kindly tone, and wanted to know whether he couldn't be of help in any other way; but Miles answered shortly though courteously that he needed nothing but what he asked for, so Simon at once told him that he could have the same horse and cart that he had had before.

It was bright moonlight that night, and old Jennings, Dr. Unwin's factotum, when he took the keys into the rectory kitchen, declared that, though he didn't believe in ghosts himself, he had a sister who did, and that he was ready to swear that he had seen something white under the elms at the farther corner of the churchyard. The cook, an orthodox Protestant, remarked that she shouldn't be surprised at anything that might happen, seeing that good-for-nothing Irish were buried there just as if they had been decent Christians; but no one had the curiosity to go out and test the truth of Mr. Jennings's assertion.

But the next morning, Sunday, there was a crowd of people in the churchyard, for fully an hour before the service began, passing and repassing to and from the corner where the body of poor Nora Lockwood had been laid. Upon the stone which had hitherto marked her grave there stood the fairest monument in pure white marble that the brain of an artist could have planned. Though no one knew it, it was the facsimile of one erected to the memory of a noble lady in Florence hundreds of years ago. Miles had found the design amongst the drawings Mr. Winsor had given him, and when he had

finished it he carried it in Simon Deverel's cart down to the churchyard that Saturday night, and fixed it by the light of the moon. On the Sunday morning Simon found his horse and cart brought back, and as he had nothing particular to do, he strolled over the heath to Lockwood's place, for he could not forget that strange look in Miles's eye the afternoon before. Half dreading, he knocked at the door of the shed, but no one answered. He lifted the latch, and to his surprise found the door unfastened. He went in and found the place deserted. Dust and marble-chips covered everything. Miles Lockwood had done his last work at Shillingbury, and had vanished from our world. Nobody ever heard of him again, but it will be long before his tragic story is forgotten. The lovely monument is a witness of this, and it still stands white and pure as ever, for every spring and autumn Simon Deverel cleans it with his own hands.

#### WAITING.

SITTING under the birch-trees, in the beautiful April day,  
Watching the gleam through the branches stream,  
Watching the sunlight's play;  
Hearing the birds' gay carol, seeing each glancing wing,  
Wishing them mute, lest the coming foot, were unheard mid the sounds of Spring.  
Sitting under the birch-trees, where the thickening lilacs made,  
Of white, purple, and green, a graceful screen, her lonely head to shade;  
Her book of the favourite poet, unheeded at her side,  
She saw the bright noon pale to twilight soon, she saw the gloaming glide,  
Glide from its couch of violets, with its sad strange lovely eyes,  
With its soft cool touch that says so much, with its voice like our happy sighs;  
With its sweet and soothing magic, for the tired heart and frame,  
That had throbb'd so strong, had tarried so long, for the footstep that never came.  
Never! The evening darkened, the night fell soft o'er all,  
Each bird in its nest had found its rest; the flowers heard sleep's low call;  
She passed by the screen of lilacs, she passed to her silent home,  
The sweet sad pain had been all in vain; the footstep had never come.

#### MYRTLE.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

"THEN you do really like San Remo, signorina?"

"Like it!" the girl exclaimed, her speaking face all aglow as she turned towards the window and put out her hands with an eloquent impulsive gesture.

"It is beyond liking. It is the very loveliest place in all the world. I wish I need never, never leave it."

"Oh, Myrtle," sighed her mother from the sofa, where she lay wrapped in countless shawls and coverlets, despite the warm soft air stealing in through the open window, "will you never learn to be less extravagantly impetuous?"

"Never," answered Myrtle. "I can't do anything by halves. I must feel with my whole soul or not at all. It's my way. Besides, Signor Benoni is used to my ecstasies by this time. You understand me now, do you not, signore?"

She threw a swift glance up at her companion, moving imperceptibly nearer to him as she spoke.

"Yes," he answered simply, but with a look in his eyes that made words needless. "I think I always do."

"That's more than I do, then," said a young blue-eyed fellow, unmistakably English from the crown of his fair hair to the soles of his serviceable boots, as he strolled lazily towards the couple in the window. "Aunt Mary is right, Myrtle. You are certainly the oddest bundle of raptures and enthusiasms that I ever came across."

Myrtle shrugged her shoulders without looking round at him.

"Oh, you! I don't expect you to understand me, Arthur; you're too different. I never expect you to sympathise with me in anything."

"I don't know about that," returned Arthur, a little nettled. "I can sympathise well enough when there's any call to do it. But why you should want to spend your days in this little, queer, dull hole, where there's nothing in the world ever going on, and only a handful of coughing English consumptives by way of society—I beg your pardon, signore, but how my cousin can prefer San Remo to England——"

"Myrtle doesn't prefer it," interrupted Mrs. Ellis a little tartly from her sofa. "She is talking at random, as her way is. No Englishwoman would ever be content to live out of England."

"I am not talking at all at random," cried Myrtle, colouring. "But what do I know of England outside of papa's parish, and what spot on all the earth could be drearier and sadder than poor little Kersley, with its eternal fogs, and rains, and coal dust, and its dismal, dirty surroundings? I am not bound to love England for Kersley's sake, or to love

Kersley, just because I have been doomed to live there all my life and have known nothing better till now. And I don't love it—I hate it—and to be transported suddenly into this land of perpetual summer; to wake up in the morning and know that the sun is shining, and will shine on and on just as brightly the whole day through; and to breathe this fresh, pure, sweet air; and gather these glorious outdoor roses, and know that more will bloom when these are done—why, it is all a dream of perfect delight to me. How can I but wish I need never waken from it?"

Arthur looked at his cousin with admiration and perplexity mingled on his boyish face. She was so handsome; and so dreadfully, so uncomfortably enthusiastic.

The Italian looked at her too, and it was to him, rather than to Arthur, that Myrtle turned for the mute response of his smile—a gentle, kindly smile that lit up his dark thin face wondrously, and seemed to linger on in his eyes long after it had left his lips.

Yes, he always understood her, down to her least and most vaguely expressed thought.

"There is Corsica at last!" exclaimed Myrtle, clasping her hands. "Look, signore; look, Arthur! Quick—it will be gone so soon."

Arthur craned forward his neck to see. Sure enough, the famous, faraway island that was beyond human reach of vision in the noonday now stood out against the horizon, clearly and boldly defined, as if within an easy sail.

"What, that stupid little bit of rock and hill over there?" said the young Briton scornfully. "I don't see anything wonderful in that."

"Ah, but it is so seldom seen from here, you know," explained Myrtle; "never, except just before sunrise or sunset, and then only under certain conditions of the atmosphere. It is eighty miles off, remember. I am always watching for it. I have grown superstitious about it. It is a sort of vision of the Holy Grail to me. I feel as if it were only when I was very good, or going to be very happy, that the sight of it was vouchsafed me."

"So have I always felt," murmured the Italian in his own musical tongue, gazing wistfully out towards the far-off isle. "To me it has always seemed like heaven, which the eye of faith sees clearest in the morning and the evening of our lives, and which

in the busy care-troubled noon becomes only a dream, or a longing, or perhaps just a memory of something beautiful that we have lost, but may find again. To me, too, it is always an omen of good when it so reveals itself against the sky."

"It is the first time we ever saw it together," said Myrtle softly. "The omen is for us both."

"Heaven grant it be so," said Benoni with an earnestness that made the words a prayer. "But no, signorina. The heaven I dream of is too fair and too far to be ever more than a fading vision in my life."

The lady on the sofa was watching the little group keenly. For some reason, the relapse into Italian displeased her.

"Myrtle," she interposed, "you are not aware, perhaps, that your hour has been over for some time, and that you are detaining the professor."

"The signore has no other pupil immediately after me to-day, and I am not detaining him," answered Myrtle with a sudden little antagonistic ring in her voice. "He stays because he likes, and I like, and we all like. I learn vastly more Italian out of my lessons than in."

"Especially when you talk English half the time," said Arthur.

"Ah, that is out of sheer politeness to stupid old you, who don't speak anything else. For me, I would always rather speak Italian than English. It suits the place, it suits the climate, it suits me."

"Myrtle," said Mrs. Ellis again, "you are talking yourself hoarse. Do you forget Lady Dunmore's party to-night, and that she asked you to sing?"

"Oh," exclaimed the girl, "I'm so glad you reminded me! I must run over my song again. Signore, you will stay, please, to hear? It is an Italian ballad. I want you to correct me if I mispronounce."

And without waiting his reply she abruptly began her song, in a full, rich, delicious contralto voice, which, wild and untutored as it was, might have charmed even the birds into listening, such a voice as one seldom hears in an amateur, and that having once heard one never forgets.

Mrs. Ellis's severe face softened as the song went on. Was it possible, at the moment, not to be proud to own the young singer for her daughter? Arthur thrust his hands in his pockets, and stood leaning stolidly against the wall, staring fixedly at the girl's head. Benoni seemed scarcely to breathe.

"There!" said Myrtle, springing suddenly

up and confronting the Italian with her bright, animated face; "was that right? Shall you be content to know I am singing it so to-night?"

"It was perfect," answered the professor in a tone that left no doubt of his sincerity. "I cannot say more. It was perfect."

Myrtle gave a little laugh, full of genuine childlike delight in her own rare gift and his keen appreciation of it, and clasped her hands together above her head.

"Oh, how happy I am!" she cried. "What a world this is to live in! A walk by the sea in the morning, a ramble through the old city and a visit to the orange-groves in the afternoon, Corsica and a song in the sunset, and a dance in the dead of the night. Oh, what a joy it is just to live! Arthur, I won't have you look so phlegmatic and indifferent. You look like a bit of a London fog dropped down by mistake in Italy. You don't know how out of place you are. Do wake up and be happy too."

"I'm awake enough," answered Arthur curtly, with a curious flush mounting to his cheeks; "it's the professor who is asleep. At least he looks as if he were in a dream."

Benoni started.

"Mr. Templeton is right. The music has carried me out of myself," he said in his strongly accented yet perfect English. "Signorina, I hope you will enjoy your dance. A rivederla."

"Wait one instant, signore; you shall have a reward for listening so patiently to my song. There, do you want it? It is my flower."

And the girl drew a sprig of myrtle from a vase upon the table and held it out to him smilingly, but without a shadow of coquetry in her manner.

"It is the colour of heaven at twilight," the Italian said as he took it from her. "Yes, it is your flower indeed. But to receive a reward for a pleasure, that is filling my life over full with blessings."

"Who is the fellow?" asked Arthur, hardly waiting till the door had closed upon the tall, slight figure. "Precious intimate here he seems. Quite a friend of the family, I should say."

"He's Professor Francesco Benoni, head of the San Remo Lyceum, and a remarkably learned and clever man," said Myrtle quickly.

"He is only Myrtle's Italian teacher," supplemented Mrs. Ellis with a frigid

intonation of voice. "Saving that, there is no question of intimacy or friendship, of course.

"Starved-looking fellow, isn't he, with his long thin figure, and those monstrous black eyes?" continued Arthur with a complacent look down at his own firmly-knit figure. "Just one's idea of an Italian: a man without any muscle, and only backbone enough to stand up on. The climate doesn't have the effect on him that it has on you, Myrtle. These five months have made a full-blown rose of you."

"Have they?" said Myrtle nonchalantly, and walked to the window and stood there humming softly to herself, utterly unmindful of the admiring eyes which followed her every movement.

It was impossible not to watch Myrtle, for she had that free, easy grace of motion consequent upon perfect health and utter lack of self-consciousness, which is in itself as attractive as beauty. Whatever she did, she seemed moving to music. She was scarcely nineteen, but so tall, so graceful, so admirably proportioned from head to foot, and, despite her impulsiveness, with such a proud dignity of carriage, as to give the impression of maturer years. Her face was by no means so faultless as her figure. Even her best friends admitted that her nose would not bear criticism a minute (though, to be sure, not one nose in a hundred will), and her mouth was still altogether too large, even under the alleviating circumstances of absolutely perfect teeth, brilliant red lips, and a frank sweet smile that brought two charming dimples with it. Yet in spite of its prominent defects, her face was unlike all others, and singularly attractive. No girls wore their hair, for instance, as she did hers, without a wave or a crinkle in it, the shining black locks brought smoothly down either side of the low forehead, and coiled loosely in at the neck; but it was the one way of ways for Myrtle. And then her eyes. It is quite positive that nobody ever had just such eyes before, for they were neither grey, nor green, nor brown, but bronze—real bronze eyes, looking out from their black fringe of lashes with an intense earnestness and truthfulness that seemed to lay her whole soul bare. It was impossible to look her in the eyes and not put implicit faith in every word that she said; impossible, too, to look there long and not grow to love her—particularly if you were a young man, and from your privileged position as cousin and lately-arrived guest,

had distinguishing claims upon her attention.

Mrs. Ellis noted and approved. Arthur Templeton, at twenty-two, with his smooth, obstinate, sulky face, was far younger than Myrtle at nineteen, and he was not remarkable in any way save for that spoiled-child look. But he was an only son and heir to great wealth, and his father was positively known to have heart-disease.

Mrs. Ellis was the wife of a clergyman to be sure, but had she been the spouse of St. Paul himself she could not have overlooked such manifest qualifications for a son-in-law as these. He seemed created for the office, so to speak. She had decided so upon the occasion of his first visit to them in their dreary little country home. And when he developed sufficient of a cough in the rude English winter for his parents to deem it advisable for him to join his uncle at San Remo, a few months after Mr. Ellis (anxious to try a southern climate for his wife's failing health), had gotten himself appointed chaplain to the newly-built English church there, the fact seemed like Heaven's direct and unequivocal benediction upon her schemes. But how was it that this Italian master had obtained quite his present footing in the family? Five months of lessons—yes, they had been there five months, and Myrtle had studied assiduously, and had met the professor repeatedly besides at a number of the best houses in the place, for he was of a good old family in spite of his calling, and certainly perfectly gentlemanly and well-bred—well, it was high time the lessons came to an end. Myrtle had learned all the Italian she needed, and perhaps a little more. If only on the excellent ground of economy, she must give up her teacher. It should be done to-morrow.

Later in the evening, coming from her room ready dressed for the party, Myrtle entered the tiny drawing-room, and found Benoni waiting there alone.

"I only ran in as I was passing to leave this book with you," he said apologetically, as he came forward to meet her. "We were speaking of it this afternoon, you know."

"I am so glad you came," replied Myrtle, giving him her hand in her frank, English fashion. "I want you to see my dress. I chose it myself. Do I look nice?"

It was some floating gauzy fabric of a pale amber tint, that no girl with a less

clear complexion or less rich colouring could have dared to wear, but it set off Myrtle's young glowing beauty to perfection. Her companion stood silently looking down at her with an expression almost of pain upon his refined, intellectual face.

"Well?" asked Myrtle again, in English this time. "How do I look, signore?"

"Like a star in an unattainable heaven," he answered at last, slowly as if the words were wrung from him. "Why do you ask me, signorina? What right have I to find you beautiful?"

Myrtle came a step nearer. There was a flush on her soft cheek.

"And why not you?" she asked gently.

"Because," he answered bitterly, "I am nothing but your Italian teacher. I may not aspire to be even a friend. I should be blind and deaf too."

The flush on Myrtle's cheek deepened to a swift indignant scarlet. Then he had overheard her mother's cruel speech.

"Signore," she said in her clear, fresh, true young voice, "I am nothing but the daughter of a poor English chaplain. In rank and poverty at least we are equals—you and I—though in all other things I know myself beneath you, not above you, and am proud to count you as my friend."

The Italian held out both his hands. A wild joy leaped up in his eyes.

"Myrtle—Myrtle, do you mean it? May I dare speak? May I dare ask more—ask if you could be content, not as my friend, but as my wife—content only with me and my love?"

Myrtle looked him full in the face, with her head thrown back and her steady eyes fastened fearlessly on his.

"I should be more than content," she said simply; "I should be very proud."

The door opened as she said the last words and Arthur came in. He too was dressed for the evening's gaiety, and in his hand he held an exquisite bouquet of pink roses.

He came up and eyed his cousin contemptively an instant; then walked critically around her with distinct approbation of expression.

"You look awfully jolly," he commented, taking a fold of her dress clumsily between his finger and thumb. "This is just the go. I never saw you show up better. And here, take this—I got it for you;" and he thrust the flowers awkwardly into her hand.

"Oh, how lovely they are!" said Myrtle, plunging her flushed face among

the cool, sweet petals. "It was ever so kind of you, Arthur, but——"

"But what?"

Myrtle held off the bouquet at arm's-length with a gay laugh.

"Don't be angry, please, but I cannot carry it. Don't you see? It would be impossible."

"And why, pray?"

"Oh, don't you see? These pink roses with this yellow dress—the colours are both lovely; but together! Oh, it spoils both! I just couldn't!"

Arthur looked very crestfallen.

"How was a fellow to know you were going to wear a yellow dress, I'd like to know? Nobody ever wears yellow; everybody always wears pink or blue."

"Of course they do. That's why I didn't," laughed Myrtle. "But I'm so sorry it happened, and I love pink roses; they are beautiful. However, they sha'n't be lost; Signor Benoni shall take them home to his sister—didn't you tell me she was not so well again to-day, signore?—and so they will give even more pleasure, perhaps, than if I carried them."

She held out the bouquet to the professor with one of her charming smiles; but Arthur instantly sprang forward and snatched it rudely from her hand.

"No one shall have the flowers if you won't," he said with the utmost irritation of voice and manner, and turning to the open window, he threw the unfortunate bunch with all his strength far out into the darkness.

In the awkward silence that followed his words they could hear it crash down among the shrubs and bushes of a neighbouring garden.

"Oh, Arthur!" Myrtle exclaimed reproachfully.

"Well," he retorted crossly, "I got them for you, and you won't have them. What I do with them afterwards is no look-out of yours." And he turned on his heel and went and sat down at the table with a book, turning the lamp viciously up till it smoked furiously. "Beastly Italian lights!" he muttered as he turned it back again lower than before. "How is anyone ever to read by them?"

"A dimani," said Benoni in a low voice as he held Myrtle's hand in a grasp that nearly crushed it, firm and substantial though it was. "A flower has bloomed in my life to-night sweeter than any blossom your hand can ever bestow again. Addio, a dimani!"

"To-morrow," repeated Myrtle; "only until to-morrow."

The morrow came, one of the few dull, drizzly mornings that ever dawn on San Remo. There was no faintest suggestion of Corsica behind the clouds that lay heavy and grey along the horizon, when Myrtle glanced from her window.

"Heaven is all in my heart," she said to herself, turning away. "All in my heart and his. We need no outward symbol."

She kept aloof from the rest all the morning. She could not bring herself to speak and act in her everyday manner with this sweet secret brimming over in her heart, and she felt safer out of sight. Most girls would have fled at once to their mothers to whisper it all out with happy blushes and broken, eager words; but Mrs. Ellis was not one of the parents who invite confidences. It was a strange little family altogether, and Myrtle seemed always a third in it; not the uniting link between the other two as an only child should have been. So now she kept apart and waited. Her lover must speak first to her father, and then—then she could step proudly forward and claim him before them all.

When he came and she heard him shown into her father's study, she fled into her own little room and shut the door. She could hear nothing there. She could only wait. Her heart was beating high, but not with fear. Oh no. Only with gladness—only with gladness, she told herself. What was there to fear? She sat at her window looking out towards invisible Corsica. The dull cloud had not lifted from it, not even when the sun, relenting, shot out a flickering beam across the waters, that turned their greyness blue, and lit up the long line of breakers with silver touches here and there among the rocks.

She could see nothing else from the window but the sea and the sloping, curving shore; but ever and anon she glanced lovingly towards the further end of her room, piercing the wall with her mind's eye, and seeing in fancy the quaint old city of San Remo, that crept straightly up the hill at their backs, as if it had wanted to get among the olive-groves without any loss of time, and had chosen the shortest and steepest way.

"Dear old San Remo," she murmured lovingly to herself. "Dear, beautiful Summerland. Now I shall never, never leave you again!"

How long she waited in the window she did not know, though the changing lights and shadows wrote out the hours on the blue face of the Mediterranean as on a turquoise dial; but at last a summons came for her to go to the drawing-room. On her way she passed Arthur, who looked at her with a very humble, almost a pleading look, which she answered with one of faint, fleeting surprise. How could she stop to think of Arthur now?

Only her parents were in the drawing-room when she entered, Mrs. Ellis not on the sofa as was her wont, but seated upright, stiff and unbending, with a very stern look on her thin, marked face. Mr. Ellis, a short, thick-set man, with a large head and bushy grey eyebrows that seemed in some way to give an utterly unpromising look to his whole face, that upon further scrutiny his close-set lips and sharp grey eyes did not belie, was walking slowly up and down the room with his hands behind him.

He stopped short as Myrtle entered and turned to face her. She felt instinctively that it was an atmosphere of war to the death, and paused near the door, slightly throwing back her head.

"Myrtle," said her father, looking keenly up at her from under his overhanging brows—the girl was if anything taller than he, "I sent for you merely to say that I have dismissed your Italian teacher. He will not come again."

Myrtle looked steadily back at him, never flinching.

"Why, papa?"

"Because," said Mr. Ellis slowly and distinctly, as if each word were sharpened on a grindstone before he spoke it; "because I find he has dared to take advantage of your innocence, your unsophisticatedness, and your, perhaps, too great freedom of manner, to speak of feelings that he has had the effrontery to allow himself to entertain for you."

Myrtle drew a quick breath.

"You mean, papa, that Signor Benoni has told you he loves me, and has asked me for his wife."

"My words are plain enough and better chosen," said Mr. Ellis dryly. "I hope you understand that you will never see the fellow again."

Myrtle did not move.

"Father," she began—her lips were very dry, and she stopped to moisten them—"father, I love him."

Mr. Ellis laughed—a short sneering laugh that cut through to the girl's heart.

"You love him? the man whom you pay four francs an hour to teach you Italian grammar? Upon my word, Myrtle, if you have lowered yourself to such an extent, at least I wonder that you confess it."

Myrtle reddened to her brows, but not with shame.

"I am willing to confess it before all the world, papa. I am proud of his love, and he is more than worthy of the best I have to give in return. Who am I to have the right to more than he can offer me? Am I rich? Am I noble? How is he beneath me? And papa, oh, papa," she broke down just a little, and stretched out her hands towards him imploringly, "is it nothing to you that I love him?"

"Love him!" repeated Mr. Ellis contemptuously. "Every girl fancies she loves the first man who courts her, whoever he is, and is quite as ready to break her heart again over the second as over the first. Anything to get married, anything not to be an old maid. But look here, Myrtle, once for all. I'll not have you name this fellow to me again, and you may spare me any heroics on the subject. I'll not have it. I hope that is distinct enough."

Myrtle turned very white, and did not answer.

"We understand each other now, I believe," continued Mr. Ellis, "and will never refer to this topic again, if you please. Now one word more on a pleasanter subject, and I must go to my study. Your cousin Arthur has done you the honour to ask you of me in marriage, and I have given him my full and free consent to address you."

"Arthur!" the girl cried in blankest amazement. "Arthur!"

"I do not wonder you are surprised," said Mr. Ellis, his cold, keen eyes watching her closely. "It is such a marriage as you could hardly have dreamed of making, you who were willing to throw away all your life to the first bidder. It is a match in every way desirable, and enviable, and proper, and when I have told you that I not only approve of it, but wish it, I need say nothing more."

"Never, never!" cried Myrtle wildly. "I will not, father, I will not!"

"I have nothing more to say to you now, Myrtle. You know perfectly what I desire and expect of you. I am demanding

no manner of sacrifice. From beginning to end I am consulting but your own best interests. But remember, I will have no more scenes—no more disgraceful folly. That is all."

Myrtle stood motionless an instant after her father left the room, then turned in heart-broken appeal to the silent figure in the easy-chair, who had never once spoken, or moved her grave eyes from her daughter's face.

"Oh, mamma," she cried, "have you, too, no pity for me? Do you, too, care nothing for my happiness? You, too, mamma? Oh, cannot you understand?"

"I do understand, far better than you, child," replied the mother. "What do you know about life, you who have just begun to live? I have learned what life really is. I have measured its experiences, and its emotions, and its miseries. I know what is best worth having in it, and can choose for you better than you can choose for yourself."

"Oh no, no, you cannot, mamma! You would choose Arthur—that is, you choose riches for me, wealth and ease, a grand home, servants, rich gowns, and the things that money gives. But I care nothing for these, mamma. I only want happiness—I only want happiness!"

"You only want the impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellis with sudden fire. "Child, you are crying for the moon. There is no happiness on earth."

"There is!" answered Myrtle. "And I want it. Do not make me miss it, mamma, as you have done. Let me be happier than you have been. Mamma, mamma, did you never love?"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Ellis almost fiercely, and then she suddenly broke into a bitter laugh of scorn. "What is love? Ah, you have got that yet to learn. You think it is something as lasting as life, strong as death, perfect as heaven. You would sacrifice everything for it, and what is it? The most unreal, the most unthankful, the most frail—most evanescent of human passions!"

"Mamma," interrupted Myrtle, "I do not know what love was to you, but I have not needed to learn first what love is—to understand as clearly as had you told me, that whatever influenced you to marry papa, it was not love. You could never have loved him, and you have loved me, too, less because I am his child. But I am not like you, mamma. Love is a real thing and a holy thing to me. It is life itself.

And where I have once given my love, I have given it wholly, without reserve and beyond change. You may force me to give up Francesco Benoni, since I would never marry against your consent. You may even force me to marry Arthur; but you can never, never, never reach my heart to alter it. There is truth in my love if in no other love in the world, and though I should never see Francesco again, I will love him till I die."

"Death is a long way off," said Mrs. Ellis with a grim smile. "Your love will be very weary before it has held so far; and in the meantime Arthur will make you a very excellent, a very sensible, and a very comfortable husband."

Alas, poor Myrtle! Her will, though so strong and brave, was at war with two older and stronger wills, before which in the end hers could but yield, weary, wounded, and defeated, though still defiant.

It was a long and unintermittent struggle, through which, to all outward eyes, life went on the same as ever in the little parsonage, save that Signor Benoni came no more, and that Myrtle went nowhere unless accompanied by either father or mother, under that system of unobtrusive but relentless espionage which is so infinitely harder to bear up against than the most open warfare.

Meanwhile Arthur waited very patiently. Those can always brook delay who are confident of ultimate success, and certainly marriage itself could give him but little more of Myrtle's companionship than he enjoyed now. He never spoke to her of love. He was shy at it, and was quite willing to leave his uncle to speak for him. Only once when Myrtle in desperation turned suddenly upon him, appealing to him to be generous, to give her up and go away, he looked at her silently a moment, flushing scarlet, and, as he looked, an obstinate, determined, unyielding expression grew into his boyish face and filled Myrtle with despair.

"I won't," he said doggedly, after that moment's silence.

And so the struggle went on day after day through all life's commonplaceness, until at last out of sheer weariness Myrtle gave it up.

"Papa," she said, "Arthur only wants me, not my heart, and if you think it right for me to marry one man, loving another, then I will marry Arthur Templeton, solely because he is rich and

will make your old age comfortable, and because, since I may not marry the man I love, it matters nothing to me whether it is Arthur or another to whom you bind my life. But understand this: While I live I shall love Francesco Benoni and him only. If there be sin in this marriage you are forcing upon me, the sin lies at your door, not mine."

"I accept the melodramatic situation without a scruple," said Mr. Ellis calmly. "You will be thoroughly happy as Arthur's wife after you have outlived this present folly."

"I shall never outlive it!" cried Myrtle passionately. "Father, do not make that mistake. I shall never outlive it!"

Mr. Ellis smiled the cruel smile of superior unbelief.

"Love is merely the passion of an hour," he said quietly. "And the hotter it is at the beginning the colder is the end. I will not have you wreck your whole life for a moment's fancy."

"You have taken my life into your own hands," answered Myrtle, controlling herself to speak with a calm equal to his, but with a sudden lightning flash of her eyes. "If it must be a wreck, so be it. But whether it be better to wreck it for money or for love, let Heaven judge."

Mr. Ellis only drew his bushy brows together in reply to this tragic appeal to a higher court. In his heart was the thorough conviction that though God governed the universe, He delegated the ruling of children entirely to the able judgment of their fathers, and never interfered in the matter at all.

And so Myrtle's engagement to Arthur became a settled and announced fact, and the wedding-day was fixed for no very distant date.

Only once before her marriage did Myrtle see Benoni again. It was in the evening, and a party of English visitors had been exploring San Remo by moonlight, under the chaperonage of Mr. Ellis and a native guide.

They were on foot, the steep, closely-crowded old city being altogether impassable to carriages, and it seemed to Myrtle that they had been wandering about for hours through the narrow, crooked, twisting streets which ran hither and thither just where they would without any plan or reason, here running up a few zigzag stairs as if with burglarious intent to get in a second-storey window, there diving unexpectedly down under an

archway, and here again making a bolt at a house and actually going clean through it without any ceremony whatever, and continuing its wild flight on the other side as if nothing had happened. Quaint and strange as it all was by daylight, by moonlight it was weirdly beautiful. The tall, ugly, fantastic old houses hustled so thickly together, and here and there bound to opposite neighbours with springing archways as if they had suddenly clasped hands across the narrow streets, stood out now all transfigured in the radiance of the unearthly silver glow, its brilliance made the more intense by the deep black of the contrasting shadows. The little party slowly wound its way homeward at last, with many a gay laugh and jest among themselves, that occasionally brought a dark-locked head to the window to gaze wonderingly after them, or momentarily checked the song of a troop of picturesquely-clad boys shouting out an operatic air as they rushed down the empty lanes.

Myrtle had been over every step of the way time and time before, and engrossed in her own thoughts, she was lagging wearily behind the rest, when as she was crossing a little patch of bright light that lay upon the pavement like a fallen jewel, she found herself face to face with Benoni. They both stopped involuntarily. Myrtle gave a faint cry, and instantly her father was by her side and drew her hand through his arm.

"Come on immediately, Myrtle. Why are you standing here?" he said sharply.

With a rapid movement the Italian threw himself in their way.

"Nay," he exclaimed, "I will speak with her this once. You shall not prevent me from only speaking with her this one time more. Signorina"—his voice dropped into low, rapid Italian—"tell me—only tell me—was it so? Did you think it presumptuous, my darling, to love you, and to claim you? Was it false, that hope you gave me?"

Myrtle twisted her hand out of her father's arm, and stood looking in her lover's face with eyes full of hopeless misery.

"It was not false, signore," she replied in English, very low but very distinctly. "Do you not know that I am true to my heart's core?"

"But this marriage that they tell of, signorina—Myrtle?"

"It is so," answered Myrtle, still in English. "They force me to it. I shall

never see you again, but I shall never forget—never change. Good-bye."

"Heaven help us both!" said Benoni in a suffocated voice. "I will be faithful till I die."

And then Myrtle was hurried away by her angry father, and a sudden cloud caught the moon in its dusky meshes, and darkness fell upon all San Remo.

## TIME BARGAINS.

A STORY IN TEN CHAPTERS. CHAPTER IX.

SCARCELY had Cecil disappeared, when Linda popped her head from behind a near-at-hand clump of evergreens.

"He did not know that I was so near him," she said as she came forward. "That look on his face—how well I remember it. It never comes but when he is in trouble. What troubles him now? Can it be the thought of leaving me? No, no! I dare not think so, for is he not about to leave me for ever? Oh, my darling, come back to me—come back!"

Her heart gave a great sob. She dashed the tears from her eyes with a passionate gesture.

"This is the portmanteau, marked with his initials, that he took with him on his wedding-tour. Oh, happy days!" From the folds of her dress she brought out a small morocco-covered case. "Here is something for him to remember his lost Linda by." She laid the case on the top of the portmanteau. "My last gift. Surely he will not refuse it. His foot-step! He must not see me here. Yet how can I bear to let him go without a word?"

A sudden thought struck her. She sprang back through the open French window, and wrapped one of the long lace curtains loosely round her. From this coign of vantage she could see without being seen. Cecil came swinging slowly round the corner. He glanced round with an air of disappointment.

"I half hoped she would be somewhere about to say one last word. But she is wiser than I, and there will be one regret the fewer in time to come. What is this? Who has been here?" he asked as the case, lying on the portmanteau, caught his eye. He took it up and opened it. Inside it was a meerschaum-pipe and a card. On the latter was some writing which he read aloud. "'A farewell gift from Linda, with her undying love.' She

has been here and left me this—she, who always held smoking in such utter abhorrence! And with her undying love! I must see her now, if it be only to say the one word—farewell.”

He replaced the pipe in the case, pressed the latter to his lips, and put it away.

“Where can she be? Where shall I find her?” He put his head into the room and glanced round. “Not here. And yet she cannot be far away. Ah!” A faint sound had caught his ear. He tore the curtain aside. There stood Linda, “You—and here!” he said, not without a touch of coldness in his tone.

Her bosom heaved, her eyes were suffused, a delicate colour tinged her cheeks: to Cecil she had never looked more lovely than at that moment. She stepped from behind the curtain.

“I thought you might refuse my little gift, and, in fact, I wanted to see——”

“What I should do with it?”

“Yes—what you would do with it.”

“I will take the pipe, Linda, and smoke it when I am far away.”

“So long as you keep it, I shall not be quite forgotten.”

“A strange present for you to make.”

“You won’t be near me when you smoke it.”

“I had forgotten that. The hidden irony of your gift had escaped me.”

Linda bit her lip and turned away. Cecil had yet to learn that it comes natural to women to sometimes sting even those they love best.

A discreet cough, and Binks appeared on the scene.

“Dog-cart ready, sir.”

“Eh—yes—all right, Binks.” Then turning to Linda he held out his hand. “The moment for saying good-bye has come.” His voice trembled a little. Linda took his hand, but did not speak.

At this instant, through the open windows of one of the rooms, the pleasant strains of music came floating on the summer breeze. Someone was playing a waltz-tune on the piano. Linda and Cecil both started—involuntarily their eyes met.

“That air! Why—is it—can it be?”

“Oh, Cecil; don’t you remember?”

“It is the tune we danced to that night——”

“When you first told me that you loved me.”

“And I did love you then, by Jove!”

“‘One more turn,’ you said when I

wanted to sit down; and just as the music was dying away you whispered, ‘Be my wife.’” Involuntarily she crept a little closer to his side. “I was too bewildered to answer you. Then, somehow, we found ourselves in the conservatory—we two, and no one else. You have not forgotten?”

“Why should a man be supposed to forget such moments any more than a woman?”

“Dear Cecil!” The words came like a whispered sigh. She was very close to him by this time. And still the sweet strains of the music rose and fell lightly on the summer air. “Then you wrapped a shawl round me,” went on Linda in a low, dreamy voice, looking straight before her with eyes that saw once more the pictures of the past which the music had called up; “and then we stole out like two guilty things into the Lime-tree Walk, and then—and then——”

“I told you all the nonsense there was in my heart.”

“And made me the happiest girl in England. But you did not think it nonsense then, Cecil.”

“No, by Jove! I was awfully in earnest.”

He never could afterwards tell how it came to pass that at this juncture he found himself with his arm round her waist. The music must have been to blame in the matter. Now high, now low, its cadences rose and fell, an idyl of love translated into harmonious sounds.

“Suppose I had said ‘No’ to you instead of ‘Yes?’” suggested Linda.

Her heart was beating against his arm like some frightened creature that had been caught against its will.

“That would have made me more desperate still,” answered Cecil.

“I’m glad I did not quite drive you to desperation.” They went forward a few steps, his arm still round her waist. “How horrified my aunt was when I told her,” continued Linda.

“She wanted you reserved for her friend, the rector.”

“Poor Mr. Glossop! How freckled he was, and what very large hands he had!”

“And then those terrible goloshes that he used to wear!”

They both laughed a little at the recollection of “poor Mr. Glossop.”

They were still strolling along like a new Romeo and Juliet, when Binks, the discreet, once more put in an appearance.

Whatever the message he was about to deliver the words died on his lips, as his eyes fell on the retreating couple.

"Well, I'm blown!" he whispered softly to himself, after a moment or two. "It seems to me that Mr. Dane's train will have to go without Mr. Dane."

A moment later the music ceased, and Lilian, all aglow with excitement, rushed out on to the verandah. Clapping her hands gleefully, she cried aloud:

"They have actually gone off together for all the world like a pair of sweet-hearts!"

"Eh, what's that you say?" queried Mr. Jellicop, who at that moment put in an appearance.

Lilian took him by the arm and pointed along the terrace.

"Do look, uncle," she said; "there go Cecil and Linda, his arm round her waist, and neither of them seeming to care a bit. And now—yes—he's actually kissing her!"

"What magic has done this?"

"I know no more than you."

"Well, it's never too late to mend, and I hope with all my heart the old adage may prove true in their case. Who knows? There may be happiness in store for them yet." He tucked Lilian's hand under one of his arms, and patted it fondly. "It will be your turn some day, Lily."

"My turn, uncle!" She spoke as demurely as you please, but for all that her cheeks flushed suddenly.

"For a husband, I mean. When that time does come, little one, bear in mind this—that all married people, however fond they may be of each other, can't expect to get through life without having their little tiffs now and then. We have all got tempers of our own, and we can't help showing 'em off at times. When my Moggy and I were first married, many's the little rumpus we used to have, and I dare say I often wished myself a bachelor again, while it's just as likely that she sometimes said to herself, 'I wish Frank and I had never met.' But, by-and-by, we got to know each other better; then one would give way a bit, and the other would give way a bit, till now there's hardly a sharp word passes between us from January to December, and I'm sure we love each other better every year we live together."

"Who could help loving dear Aunt Jellicop?"

"Ha, ha! I drew a prize, that's certain."

He stooped and kissed her, then he consulted his watch, and then he said a little anxiously: "I wonder whether Marmaduke sent that telegram? I had better go and hunt him up." With which words he went quickly back indoors.

"How it thrills me to hear that name spoken by another!" said Lilian to herself. "When I was engaged to Cuthbert I never had the same feeling that I have now. I don't know what it is, only that it is something very strange and delicious."

She was pacing the verandah slowly backwards and forwards, her hands intertwined in front of her; her eyes suffused with tender light; a smile, evanescent as April sunshine, playing round the coral curves of her lips.

"He has another name—Alan," she murmured under her breath. "I never thought Alan a nice name till now. Will he finish telling me to-day what he left untold yesterday? What if he has changed his mind? Men do sometimes change their minds, I suppose."

This thought was almost more than she could bear. The April sunshine vanished from her lips, and April tears came into her eyes. "I—I think I had better go and look at the Times, and see whether anybody is in want of a governess."

She was going back dejectedly, her eyes bent on the ground, when just as she reached the outside of the French window the object of her thoughts appeared on the inner side.

"Lilian!" he exclaimed, and there was no mistaking the eagerness of his tone.

"Alan!" she cried, startled into a momentary forgetfulness of what she ought to have said.

He sprang forward, and seized both her hands in his. "My own!"

"What have I said!" she cried in a lovely confusion. "Do please let me go, Captain Marmaduke;" and she tried to take back her captive hands.

"Not till you have said that name again." His long brown fingers still held her fast.

"It was a mistake. I did not know what I was saying. Indeed I must go. I—I am wanted indoors."

"You must not go till I have told you all I want to say. Lilian, I love you! Will you be mine?"

It would appear that Captain Marmaduke had the faculty of stating a case clearly, and in the fewest possible words.

No beating about the bush with him evidently.

Lilian was all in a tremble. Her face was white enough now.

"Yours!" she contrived to stammer out after a moment or two of silence. "Your——"

"My wife."

Again silence. Then in a whisper so faint that he could scarcely hear the words:

"Can you be in earnest?"

"Never more so in my life."

"It seems like a dream."

"Say yes, and make it a reality."

She did not speak; her eyes were bent on the ground; her heart was beating painfully; her hands were still in bondage.

"Lily, look into my eyes and answer me. Will you have me for your husband?"

Timidly, yet gladly, came the low-breathed answer: "Yes—yes." But there was a little sob in her voice for all that.

"My own darling!" The flame of love alight in his dark eyes leapt yet higher. He drew her fondly to him. "No three years' marriage system for us," continued Marmaduke. "Our union must be for life or not at all." Tenderly between his hands he took the sweet young face that was turned up so lovingly to his own. He kissed the softly trustful eyes, he kissed the glowing cheeks, he kissed her lips. Evidently he was a greedy man, this Alan Marmaduke. It is sad to be compelled to write that he was not repulsed.

"The old she-dragon, as I live!" exclaimed Marmaduke suddenly, as Mrs. Wapshot came round the corner. And incontinent he fled. All men are cowards, it is said, and apparently he was no exception to the rule.

"I hope I am not interrupting," said Mrs. Wapshot grimly.

"Not at all," answered Lilian hurriedly; but in truth she was too confused to know what she said.

"Beware, my dear, beware! All men are libertines at heart, and this stranger from over the seas—what do we really know about him? For your own sake you must be got out of harm's way."

Here Mrs. Wapshot coughed and began to fumble in a voluminous pocket.

"I have not been unmindful of your interests. I have here a note from Lady Glendower. Her invalid daughter is in want of a companion. Just the sort of situation you are fitted for. I have already

replied to her ladyship, and accepted it in your name."

By this time Lilian had recovered from her confusion. Her spirit was up in arms.

"A thousand thanks, my dear Mrs. Wapshot," she replied in her most dulcet tones. "I hope her ladyship won't be disappointed when she hears that I have already accepted another situation."

"Another situation, child!"

"Yes, that of Captain Marmaduke's promised wife."

"What! You don't mean to tell me you are going to marry that man?"

"Indeed, but I hope I am going to marry that man."

For a moment or two Mrs. Wapshot was speechless. Then she said, shaking her lean forefinger in the girl's face:

"Lilian Ramsay, you will repent this rash and ill-advised step to your dying day. You may depend upon it, that man left four or five black wives behind him among the savages."

"Poor things! How I pity them!" answered Lilian sweetly. "They will never—never see him again." And making Mrs. Wapshot one of her most demure curtsies, she turned, without another word, and fled indoors.

"Well, of all the artful young minxes!" muttered the discomfited matron to herself when she found herself thus unceremoniously left alone. "The world is coming to a pretty pass when I'm to be talked to in that style. I must go and tell Vere and Cuthbert the news."

#### CHAPTER X.

THE verandah and the terrace in front of it had not been left to solitude more than a few minutes when Linda and Cecil came strolling back cosily arm-in-arm.

"You shall smoke as much as you like and as often as you like," Linda was saying.

"Just as I was thinking of cutting down my smoke one-half!"

"You must not do anything of the kind, dear, because—because"—this, in a confidential whisper—"I am learning to smoke myself."

Cecil turned and faced his wife in sheer astonishment. "The deuce you are!" he said slowly.

"Only the most tiny, delicious, perfumed cigarettes imaginable. From Spain, you know. All Spanish ladies smoke, don't they?"

"But you are an English lady."

"There, now, I believe you are angry. When I thought I was doing my best to please you!"

"Imitation the sincerest form of flattery—eh? Do you happen to have any of those tiny, delicious, perfumed trifles about you?"

"Here are all I have," answered Linda, putting into his hand an embroidered cigarette-case.

"Allow me to take charge of them," he said as he dropped the case into his pocket. "And I think, if I were you, I wouldn't smoke any more of them till I found myself in Spain."

"Very well, Cecil. But you will kiss me to show you are not angry."

His answer was, not one kiss but two.

"I have something here that I am positive will please you," resumed Linda, when that little ceremony had been satisfactorily gone through.

"Eh?" asked Cecil a little dubiously.

"A silver latch-key, dear. I had it made six months ago, but we had one or two little tiffs about that time, and I didn't give it you. But now that my own one is coming back to me, here it is."

Cecil took the key, turned it over in his hand, and looked at it doubtfully.

"No, Linda, you sha'n't put such a temptation into my pocket," he said. "Take it back and keep it till I ask you for it."

"Yes, Cecil, of course, if you wish it; but it seems as if I had no confidence in you, when I have."

"More, perhaps, than I have in myself. But these concessions must not be all on your side. I'll—yes, I'll go with you to a classical concert, now and then, and try my hardest to like it."

"You dear, darling old boy!"

"And if, sometimes, when they are deep in a symphony, or far gone in a sonata, you see my eyes gradually close, and my head begin to nod, a pinch in the soft part of the arm will never fail to bring me round."

"As if I could bear to hurt my pet!"

"And—yes, by Jove! you shall buy as much old crockery as you like."

"Old crockery, dear!"

"Ceramic stuff, you know—hideous cups and saucers, cracked plates, idiotic teapots, monsters from Japan. You shall fill the house with them!"

"How kind of you—how noble!"

While talking, they had strolled a little way down the lawn. They now sat down side by side on a rustic seat.

"For all the world like our courting days over again," murmured Linda in a tone of perfect contentment.

"There they are," whispered Cuthbert to his father, as the two emerged from one of the winding walks. "I've been watching them for the last half-hour. I saw him put his arm round her waist and kiss her, and look how they are sitting now. They—they can't have made it up again—eh?"

The two men stared blankly at each other for a few moments.

"We will soon find out," said the elder one. "You remain here."

With that, he advanced across the grass and touched Dane lightly on the shoulder.

"Ha, ha, not gone yet?" he said pleasantly. "I thought you were miles away by this time. Your friend Elliott will wonder what has become of you."

"I've changed my mind; I'm not going," answered Cecil. "By Jove! though, I had forgotten about Elliott. I must send him a telegram."

"Not going!" exclaimed Naylor, aghast.

Mr. Dane shook his head.

"And there is something else that you will be still more pleased to hear," remarked Linda with a saucy triumph in her eyes.

"What may that be, madam?—what may that be?"

"That I have just had an offer of marriage."

"An offer! You!"

"Why not I as well as anyone else? And what is more, I've not said 'no.' Don't blush, dear," she added, turning to Cecil.

Not that there was the remotest probability of that cool individual doing anything of the kind.

Mr. Naylor stared from one to the other.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to re-marry each other?" he gasped out.

"That is precisely what we are going to do," responded Dane, gazing at him blandly through his eyeglass.

Tears had not been so close to Mr. Naylor's eyes since the days when he was birched at school as they were at the present moment.

"My dear madam, my dear Dane," he exclaimed with a sort of comic pathos, "let me beg of you to pause, to—to hesitate, to reconsider your decision, before making up your minds to do anything so utterly rash and ill-advised. If you must

marry again, marry somebody else. There are plenty of other people in the world. It will be wrong, it will be revolutionary, it will be 'bad form.' Think what the verdict of society will be. Above all, why deliberately make yourselves unhappy again?"

Linda shook her pretty head, utterly unconvinced.

"We have decided that it is better to be unhappy together than miserable apart."

Mr. Naylor could only throw up his hands, give utterance to a groan, and go back disconsolately to his son.

"A brace of arrant fools," was his remark to the latter. "Nothing to be done in that quarter. Your only chance is with the other one."

"I am not sorry. If I have a preference in the matter it is for Mrs. Elliott-Temple."

"And her fortune is not much less than that of Mrs. Dane. Suppose we go and consult your mother. She has a fine fund of common-sense when one can get her away from that entomological hobby of hers."

"And can't we re-marry till the end of six months?" asked Linda with a little quaver in her voice.

"The law says we cannot."

"Then the law's a great stupid."

"Other people have had reason to make the same remark."

"Why can't all the months be as short as February?" sighed Linda.

Mr. Jellicop and Marmaduke came strolling across the grass together.

"There's no one, Marmaduke, to whom I would give my Lily sooner than to you," said the former.

"The future will prove that your confidence has not been misplaced."

Linda and Cecil had risen, and the four now met face to face.

"So, so," said Jellicop, "these are the young idiots, are they, who have had sense enough, at the last moment, to see the folly of their ways?"

"Yes, uncle, we have come to our senses at last."

"And is it really true that you have fallen in love with each other over again?"

"Quite true—isn't it, Cis?"

"Dreadful case of spoons, really," responded Cecil the serene.

"Are you not glad, uncle?"

"Very glad indeed, my dear." And with that he gave her one of his hearty old-fashioned kisses. "I only hope the

lesson won't be thrown away on either of you. If only Elliott and Agnes would follow suit, I should be one of the happiest fellows in Christendom."

It almost seemed as if Agnes might have overheard his words, for next moment she emerged from the house, and came down the verandah steps arm-in-arm with Lilian, Mrs. Wapshot following closely behind.

"Why, little white-face, I thought you were told that you had no business out of your room?" said her uncle with an unwonted tenderness in his voice.

"She is so headstrong, that there is no doing anything with her," interpolated Mrs. Wapshot in her most acidulated tones.

"When I heard of Lilian's happiness, it brought back my loss so keenly, that I felt I must see her and talk to her," said Agnes, as she gazed with wistful sorrow-charged eyes into her uncle's face. "And Linda and Cecil too. Oh, uncle, why did you let Stephen go before I could ask him to forgive me, before I could tell him——"

Suddenly she stopped. She had heard a sound unheard by any of the others. Her face changed on the instant. It was as though another woman had stepped suddenly into her place. Her eyes went out to meet the coming footsteps, and the eyes of all there, magnetised by hers, followed the same direction.

A moment later, and Stephen Elliott, his travelling cape thrown over his arm, appeared round the left wing of the house. He had driven from the station, and had been told that he would find Mr. Jellicop on the lawn.

At sight of him Agnes took a step or two forward with outstretched arms.

"Stephen! Husband!" she cried.

Only those two words; but there was a world of pathetic meaning in the way they were uttered.

Mrs. Wapshot laid a hand lightly on her arm.

"You forget yourself, child; you have no husband."

"And Elliott no wife," added Mr. Naylor, who had appeared as if by magic on the scene.

Elliott came forward, and turning to Jellicop, not without a certain sternness, said:

"What trickery is this, sir? I was telegraphed for; told that she," pointing to Agnes, "was ill—perhaps dying. I am at a loss to know why I have been fetched back."

"There is no trickery in the affair at

all," answered the squire with a red spot burning in each cheek. "That's a kind of commodity I'm not in the habit of dealing in. It was I who sent for you. If your wife is not dying, she is breaking her heart, and that comes to pretty much the same thing."

"Breaking her heart!" said Stephen incredulously.

Agnes drew a step or two nearer to him.

"Stephen!"

Truly it sounded like the cry of one whose heart was breaking.

But he only drew back a little and said coldly:

"I am here."

Agnes shivered slightly, as if suddenly smitten by an icy wind. Controlling herself by a supreme effort, she said:

"Will you not listen to what I have to say? I will not detain you long."

Stephen bowed a grave assent, but did not speak.

"When, this morning, my senses came back to me," said Agnes, "and I found that you had gone, and when I thought that I might never see you again, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes. I saw things as I had never seen them before. I saw what a weak, wicked, and selfish creature I had been—I say this openly before all now present. I saw how I had ruined my home, wrecked my happiness, and changed my husband's love to gall. And all because I was tormented by a foolish jealousy which I knew in my heart to have no foundation in fact. Then I felt that it would kill me if you left me for ever without saying that you forgave me. Leave me, if it must be so, but do not go till you have said: 'Agnes, you are forgiven!'"

All Stephen Elliott's sternness, which was far more assumed than real, had vanished long before Agnes ended her appeal. Various conflicting emotions—surprise, pity, love, joy—vibrated in his heart and shone out of his eyes as he listened.

"If I dared but believe——" he said, and then he hesitated and was silent.

Again the appealing arms went out towards him.

"You may believe!"

Her voice thrilled the hearts of her hearers strangely. Linda clung in tears to her husband's arm. Lillian was crying silently. Jellicop's hand had found the hand of Marmaduke and grasped it tightly. Even Vere Naylor fumbled for his handkerchief.

"Is there no such thing as repentance? Oh, Stephen, believe me that I do repent with all my heart!"

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before Stephen's arms were round her and his lips pressed fondly to hers.

"Let all the unhappy past be forgotten and as though it had never been," he said.

"And am I to be yours again, never to part from you?" she asked, a great wonder and gladness shining out of her face.

Solemnly yet tenderly he gazed upon her.

"Mine, never to part from me again."

"The lesson they have learned to-day will not readily be forgotten," said Jellicop to Marmaduke.

"If this sort of thing becomes common, my Marriage Act will turn out to be a dead letter," remarked Naylor grimly.

"They can't re-marry for six months—that's one comfort," said Cuthbert gloomily.

Mrs. Wapshot nodded her head as one who knows.

"Let them bide a wee," she said. "They will be tired of each other again long before then."

Jellicop slapped the Member for Fudgington on the shoulder.

"Naylor," said he, in his bluff hearty voice, "we'll have up a magnum of 'fifty-eight port to drink health and happiness to the young folk and confusion to your New Marriage Act!"

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